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SUBJECT: TURKISH MFA, NGOS PLAN ISTANBUL DEMOCRACY
ASSISTANCE DIALOGUE MEETING

REF: STATE 64116

1. This is a joint Embassy Ankara/ConGen Istanbul message.

2. Summary: Turkish MFA officials, its lead NGO partner in the Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD) TESEV, and Turkish women's NGO representatives met on April 10 to begin planning for a June DAD conference in Istanbul focusing on women. They discussed possible subject areas, including violence against women, and tentatively set June 20-21 as the dates for the conference. Several NGO participants questioned holding the conference under BMENAI auspices, but participated positively after explanations about BMENAI and Turkey's role in it. TESEV expects between 70 to 100 attendees from BMENAI countries, Europe and the U.S.. The three DAD partner country NGOs have applied for funding for a MEPI grant for follow-on activities. End Summary.

Planning Meeting Overcomes NGOs' Doubts

3. According to MFA Policy Planning Department Head Tezel, several NGOs questioned holding the conference under BMENAI auspices. Tezel told us MFA officials explained that Turkey shares the BMENAI's vision of reform, but the comments suggest a continuing need for the MFA and lead NGO partner TESEV (Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation) to continue explaining BMENAI and why Turkey supports it. The MFA and TESEV are considering meeting again with Turkish NGOs before June to do that. At the end of the meeting, Tezel requested that we keep reinforcing with other BMENAI partner and regional countries that Turkey is a partner, not a target country.

4. TESEV program officers Sanem Guner and Sabiha Gundogar told Istanbul poloffs that MFA BMENAI Coordinator Ambassador Orhun chaired the meeting. Orhun explained the origins of BMENAI and Turkey's role as a DAD co-sponsor with Italy and Yemen. In addition to TESEV, 20 directors of Turkey's most influential women's NGOs attended the April 10 meeting. Guner and Gundogar commented that, due to negative Turkish media coverage of BMENAI, the NGO representatives appeared unclear about their DAD role even after Orhun's speech.

5. However, the NGO representatives attitudes warmed after the address of Professor Yesim Arat of Bogazici University. Arat explained why she was involved in the project, emphasizing that Turkish women should share their experience of democracy with women of other Muslim majority population countries in the region, and could also learn new methods of democracy. Arat stressed the importance of including in the June meeting women in the Middle East who are respected, adding that it would not be useful to invite women who are marginalized or in exile.

6. Following Arat's speech, the NGO leaders began to participate more actively in the meeting, sharing issues and making concrete suggestions for themes and developing a preliminary agenda. Guner and Gundogar agreed that by the end of the day, the NGO participants were positive about the seminar and their role in it.

Organizers Expect 70-100

7. Guner and Gundogar expect about 70-100 people at the June meeting. Invitees from BMENAI countries, the U.S. and Europe will include officials, academics, NGOs and women activists. Leaders of the Italian and Yemeni NGOs who are working with TESEV on the DAD project, No Peace without Justice (Italy) and the Human Rights Training Information Center (Yemen) will attend, as well as a representative from the National Endowment for Democracy. All civilian participants will be funded by TESEV.

8. TESEV raised in the April 10 planning meeting the intention to make the June 20-21 seminar the first step in a long-term process of networking and building consciousness about the DAD. Among the suggestions discussed were developing a website as well as forming an e-mail group. TESEV's goal is for Turkish women and other women working on women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa to take control of the project, so that communication and action will

continue after the June meeting.

Long-Term Funding

19. Tezel continues to tell us that there are no problems funding the Istanbul conference. However, both Tezel and TESEV program officers note that funding for the long-term is still uncertain. The lead DAD NGO, the Italian "No Peace without Justice," along with TESEV and the Yemeni NGO, have applied to MEPI for a USD 900,000 grant to develop future programs and regional activities for the DAD. MEPI would fund program activities and the Italian government would match funds for other expenses, according to Guner and Gundogar. They expect to learn of the award in the next two months.

Algiers Literacy Workshop

110. Turkey will send one education expert to the April 24-26 Algiers Literacy Workshop (reftel); a representative from Turkey's Embassy in Algiers will also attend. Tezel told us Turkey is considering it but has not yet decided upon other BMENAI efforts to which it can contribute.
EDELMAN